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ABSTRACT

This report discusses a new assessment tool being developed by researchers at the National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL) for assessing early intervention program quality. The Early Intervention Services Assessment Scale (EISAS) is designed to comprehensively assess the quality of early intervention services provided to young children with disabilities and their families. The two versions to the EISAS are detailed: a program version, focusing on assessment, intervention planning, service provision, transition, and administration; and a parent version, focusing on child and family assessment, intervention planning, early intervention services, transition, and administration. The report delineates unresolved issues and challenges, including whether childcare quality research provides a useful framework for understanding early intervention quality and whether the measure can be used broadly across different programs throughout the country. (KB)

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NCEDL Spotlights

No. 7 February 1999

Assessing Program Quality

Here are excerpts from "Defining and Measuring Quality in Early Intervention Programs for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities and Their Families: Challenges and Unresolved Issues," which appeared in the January 1999 edition of *Early Education and Development*. The article discusses a new assessment tool which is being developed by researchers at the National Center for Early Development & Learning (NCEDL), UNC-CH.

Scale will assess early intervention program quality

NCEDL researchers are developing the Early Intervention Services Assessment Scale (EISAS) to comprehensively assess the quality of early intervention services provided to young children with disabilities and their families. Development has involved an extensive review of child care quality and early intervention literature, a survey, and focus groups with parents, program administrators, service providers, and researchers. Characteristics of service that people believe are important to quality are:

- **Timely access to services for children, families**
- **Warm, responsive interpersonal quality of service providers**
- **Sensitivity to family beliefs, values, and priorities**
- **Effective parent-professional communication**
- **Knowledge, experience of service providers**
- **Availability of services, supports**

Early intervention programs are a complex system of services and supports that are provided by multiple agencies and professionals to a diverse group of children and families. Challenges to the objective assessment of quality can be that programs represent a broad range of services; child and family services are highly individualized; services seek to address a wide range of child and family goals; and many features of quality are highly subjective.

The EISAS addresses these challenges through a program and a parent version:

EISAS: Program Version

I. Assessment
1. Family participation in the child assessment process
2. Child assessment process
3. Responsiveness of the child assessment process
4. Family assessment process

II. Intervention planning
5. Family participation in the intervention planning process
6. Intervention planning process

III. Service provision
7. Family participation in the child intervention process
8. Child intervention process
9. Context of child interventions
10. Responsiveness of the child intervention process
11. Family supports and services

IV. Transition
12. Family participation in the transition process
13. Transition process for the child

V. Administration
14. Service coordination
15. Promoting professional development
16. Program evaluation
17. Interagency collaboration

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EISAS: Parent Version

I. Child and FamilyAssessment
1. Child assessment
2. Family assessment

II. Intervention planning
(Developing the Individual Family Service Plan)

III. Early Intervention Services

IV. The Transition Process
(From infant-toddler to preschool services)

V. Administration
1. Service coordination
2. Training and evaluation

Unresolved Issues and challenges

1. **Can child care quality research provide a useful framework for understanding early intervention quality?** Discussion of the characteristics of early intervention programs suggests that services encompass aspects of structural quality (i.e. what services are provided, where are they provided, who provides them), as well as dynamic or process aspects of quality (i.e. how the services are provided, the quality of the relationships). The challenge is to accurately assess these objective and subjective dimensions of quality that are unique to early intervention.

2. **Can dimension of early intervention quality be accurately and appropriately assessed by the EISAS?** The broad scope and highly individualized nature of services, the multiple intervention goals, and the subjective perceptions of quality pose significant methodological challenges. An important question is whether a reliable and valid instrument can be developed that includes all relevant early intervention domains, and captures the intent

3. **Will the definitions of quality, as defined by EISAS indicators, inform early intervention program planning, improvement, and research?** Considerable work needs to be done to determine if this measure of early intervention quality can be used broadly across different programs throughout this country. Significant variation exists among states in how early intervention programs are organized, implemented, and governed. Also, can this instrument function as a research tool to help document and understand the relationship between quality practice and outcomes for children and families?

4. **What can we learn about the influence of variations of quality on child and family outcomes in early intervention?** It would be an important contribution to early intervention programs and to research to understand what specific features of quality best predict optimal child and family outcomes. As limited resources are available to meet an expanding need, the accountability of services is critical. and spirit of "excellent" quality.

If you want to know more

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